

Trump's Troop Withdrawal from Germany: A Dangerous Move Weakening International Security

By Kamila Magiera

On June 30, U.S. President Donald Trump confirmed reports of his plans to withdraw 9,500 troops from Germany, a move widely criticized by European allies and both Republican and Democrat members of Congress. The proposed withdrawal would decrease by 28% United States armed forces permanently stationed in Germany. This *démarche* by the Trump Administration harms NATO and helps the Kremlin's long-term military and political project to dominate all of Europe.

President Trump's plan calls for United States armed forces now permanently stationed in Germany to be redeployed to the Indo-Pacific region by September 30. Critics question this proposed redeployment to Guam, Hawaii, Japan, and Australia. U.S. Ambassador to Poland Georgette Mosbacher also expressed in a recent interview with Polish media that the U.S. will provide 1,000 additional troops for continuous rotation in-and-out of Poland every 90 days. This additional 1,000 U.S. troops may not be drawn from those now permanently stationed in Germany.

According to a statement by a Pentagon spokesperson, "the proposal that was approved not only meets the president's directive, it will also enhance Russian deterrence, strengthen NATO, reassure allies, improve U.S. strategic flexibility and U.S. European Command's operational flexibility, and take care of our service members and their families." However, it has been reported that this plan came from a few people inside the White House without the consultation with the Department of Defense. Issues including housing and transportation are only a few of the concerns, citing an unrealistic and poorly planned effort by the administration.

With a significant amount of pushback from both the House and Senate, a bipartisan effort has been developing to showcase "dissatisfaction with the administration's rationale for the move and concerns it will weaken NATO." Already, the Republican-led House Armed Services Committee plans on countering the Trump Administration, citing that this decision would benefit the Kremlin, discredit the U.S. to its allies, and create an impossible logistical situation for the Department of Defense. Republican Senator Mitt Romney of Utah is also leading efforts against Trump's move, proposing an amendment that would "prevent funds from being used to reduce the number of troops serving in Germany below 34,500 until the defense secretary verifies for Congress the move would not harm NATO, U.S. military operations or military families." Romney is additionally exploring whether allies have been briefed on the relocation and that the transfer will not cost the U.S. a significant amount. The amendment demonstrates a strong bipartisan effort, including some of Trump's biggest supporters; co-sponsors include Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), Tim Kaine (D-Va), and Chris Coons (D-Del.)

Troop withdrawal from Germany is dangerous for four reasons: it was political retaliation against Germany without the consideration of NATO's importance, additional troops in Poland may prove to be ineffective, and the Kremlin will have a more advantageous presence in Europe.

In 2014 at the NATO summit in Wales, leaders agreed that members would have to spend no less than two percent of their national GDP to NATO to maintain defense funds. Analysts say Trump's main motive behind troop withdrawal is his anger towards Germany and Chancellor Angela Merkel regarding their inability to contribute the whole two percent of their GDP to the fund. However, it is important to note that the presence of U.S. troops in Germany is not for the country's safety and

security, but rather for the entire Eastern European flank. These forces are vital to limiting the Kremlin's aggression in the eastern part of NATO. According to Alexander Vershbow, former deputy secretary-general of NATO and the U.S. Ambassador to Russia, "The credibility of NATO's deterrent depends critically on its capacity to rapidly reinforce any ally that could be threatened by aggression with little warning, including the most vulnerable Baltic states. Cutting the number of troops in Germany too sharply, or moving some of them to the United States, could make it harder for NATO to reinforce quickly enough to prevent Russia from presenting the Alliance with a fait accompli." It is critical to understand that this move can embolden the Kremlin and serve as an opportunity for Russia to test its aggressions.

President Trump strongly emphasized that although Germany would experience a decrease in U.S. troops, he would ensure that they would be moved to Poland to preserve its presence in Europe. However, this stance can reduce NATO's eastern front's survivability against a Russian attack. "Moving some of the US troops to Poland would preserve some of the reinforcement capability now based in Germany, but risks over-concentrating US forces," states Vershbow. This transferral can also create political stains as the optics demonstrate that Trump cares more for the security of Poland than Germany. President Andrzej Duda of Poland has expressed his concern to President Trump during his June visit to the White House, citing that withdrawing troops from Germany would weaken NATO's deterrent, but received push back from Trump, claiming that Germany is not doing enough on their part and that he would rather focus on the "security of all the Allies." Regarding international agreements, the NATO-Russia Founding Act, also known as the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, was signed in 1997 in an effort to build a partnership between the Kremlin and Europe. However, after Russia's violation of this international law in 2008 and 2014, NATO has "asserted that it might be more politically reassuring and financially efficient to permanently station these 'heel-to-toe' rotational forces' in Poland. As a result this may increase the troops' human and geographic terrain knowledge in comparison to a rotating deployment for nine months. On the other hand, a number of analysts have expressed "concern that additional U.S. forces in Poland could escalate tensions in and around Kaliningrad." It is evident that moving troops to Poland is a mistake as it creates greater political tensions and may set Eastern Europe up for failure if the Kremlin were to attack.

Lastly, Russian President Vladimir Putin will be emboldened as there is a significant reduction of U.S. forces in Europe, demonstrating the importance of properly redeploying troops and not abandoning NATO allies. Over the last two decades, Putin has made substantial investments in the Kremlin's military capacities and operations, and limiting presence at this moment would be considered a win and advantageous move for Russia. As seen, when there is a limited effort on behalf of the U.S., Putin and the Kremlin pursue offensive capabilities along its borders and in areas of interest, such as in Ukraine and Syria. With an increase in contract soldiers, improved training, improved missile forces, and tactical operations, the Kremlin can see the Trump administration's move as an opening for their agenda and interests.

President Trump's intentions to remove troops from Germany are a threat to allies, international security, and millions of people around the world. This decision must be met with pushback from elected officials in Congress as well as the American people in order to reverse this plan by the White House.

Sources:

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/whats-at-stake-in-trumps-plans-to-withdraw-troops-from-germany/>

<https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2020/06/30/congress-moves-to-block-trumps-germany-troop-withdrawal-plans/>
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF11280.pdf>
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/18/trump-withdraw-troops-germany-military-spending/>
<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/06/30/trump-approves-pentagon-plan-to-pull-9500-us-troops-from-germany/>
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2573.html